

A manager who has returned from a training course is explaining the technique of the “six thinking hats” to her team.

Optional activity:

While you listen, decide whether the following sentences are true or false.

Sentence	True or false?
1 There is a book called “The Six Thinking Hats”.	
2 The technique makes you become more optimistic.	
3 Each thinking hat represents a management style.	
4 Wearing the black hat helps you identify possible problems.	
5 Wearing the blue hat helps you behave like a chair person.	
6 You need six people to use this technique.	

“The six thinking hats” is a tool that anybody can use when they have to make an important decision. It was created by Edward de Bono. He’s got a book with the same title so if you’re interested you can go away and read that later. The technique makes you look at a decision from a number of different perspectives. It makes you a better decision maker because it forces you to consider points of view that are outside your normal perspective. What that means is that you start to understand a complex decision and and this is important ... it helps you to see opportunities which you might never have seen.

We all have different ways of approaching a decision. Some people are rational and positive, others are negative. Then we have the emotional people and the creative or intuitive. This technique teaches us to think like all of these people, mix the strengths of all of them and then make the best decision.

So we start off with a decision that you have to make. You can do this now if you like. You don’t need to tell anyone. Just think of an important decision that you are finding it hard to make. Now you have to look at the decision while “wearing” each of the six hats. Each “thinking hat” represents a style of thinking. And each hat is a different colour. Let’s have a look at each of them in turn. It will have to be brief but we can go into more detail in the next training session.

With the white hat you focus on all of the data available. You see what you can learn from the information. You identify gaps in your knowledge and you do what you can to fill them in. You analyse previous, similar cases and try to learn from them.

When you are wearing the red hat you face the decision with intuition and emotion. You follow your gut instinct and you also think about other people will react emotionally to your decision.

The Green Hat is the creative hat. This is where you try to think of creative solutions to a problem. There are lots of creative tools that you can use but we haven’t got time to talk about them right now.

The yellow hat is your optimist hat. It helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and spot the opportunities that arise from it. Wearing your yellow hat helps you to keep going when things look grim.

When you’ve got the black hat on you become a pessimist. You are on the defensive. You are cautious and you think of all the things that could go wrong with a particular decision. This is useful because it helps you to identify weak points so that you can eliminate them. Thinking with your black hat on will make your plans stronger. It’s the most interesting of the hats for me. That’s because I think most successful people are used to thinking positively and so they can’t always see problems in advance.

Finally, the blue hat represents control. This is the hat worn by people who chair meetings. When we are running out of ideas in a meeting the blue hat might tell everybody to put their green hats on. When it’s important to consider how a decision will affect the feelings of others the blue hat will instruct everybody to put their red hats on ... and so on.

You can use the six thinking hats technique alone or in meetings.

I'm afraid I haven't got enough time to go into more detail here but I think I've covered the main ideas. In the next session we'll look at a practical example ...

Answer key: 1T; 2F; 3F; 4T; 5T; 6F.